AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL

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So, did Mike McKone deliver a brutal fight between Taskmaster and Finesse, or what? After such an amazing job, it's even harder to announce that this is Mike's last issue…after living and breathing *Avengers Academy* for a year and a half, he's ready to move on to new creative challenges (though he can't quit us cold turkey, so he's staying on as cover artist through issue #12). Mike and I created these wacky kids together…we're kind of a hairier, less attractive version of the old sitcom "My Two Dads"…and it's sad to see him go. But we've already talked about working together again, so it's not goodbye, just "'til next time." However, it's much more interesting if there's intrigue and violence behind his departure, so my official story is that we got into a Guinness-fueled knife fight over who's better, the Jam or the Style Council. (Otherwise known as "old man fight.")

As they say, though, when one door closes, another opens. I'm beyond thrilled to announce our new regular penciler is none other than the man who delivered such an epic Giant-Man/Absorbing Man battle in issue #7…that's right, Tom Raney! I've been a huge fan of Tom's since his work on *Warlock* back in the day, and finally getting to collaborate with him is a dream come true. He starts his regular run next month with issue #11, the first part of our epic "Return of Korvac" storyline! Longtime Avengers fans will remember Korvac as the villain of one of the all time classic Avengers tales, "The Korvac Saga" (available in collected form!), and it's a huge thrill for me to have him face our intrepid cadets and faculty…as well as both main Avengers teams! Oh yes, we're starting Tom off in the deep end…if he survives drawing as many characters as there are in #11, he can handle anything!

But wait…isn't this issue #9? How can issue #11 be coming next month? Simple…you get two issues of *Avengers Academy* next month! And issue #10 is drawn by another artist I'm a huge fan of, Sean Chen! We'll be double-shipping a few times in 2011, and I'm pleased to report Sean will be our regular "extra issue" penciler. I've worked with Sean before on *War Machine* and *Mighty Avengers*, and his lovely art is always a pleasure to behold!

Okay, enough of my long-winded preamble…on to your letters!

Dear Avengers Academy team,

Thank you for yet another great issue (#7). Over just a handful of issues, *Avengers Academy* has turned into the first book I read and the first Marvel book I recommend to anyone looking for a great title. Every issue I learn something new and unexpected about these characters. I still think Hank Pym is a jerk, but he's an interesting one, and he keeps taking me by surprise.

Now, if you're still looking for 'guest star' suggestions, I wonder if the characters from *The Order* are on the table? Becky Ryan was a teen pop star who went through some growing pains of her own, and I bet the Academy kids would be keen to meet her. Just a thought!

Keep the great comics coming,

Caroline Pruett
Richmond, Virginia

Thanks, Caroline! Hmm, it might be interesting to see some members of The Order… definitely food for thought!

Great issue, one that really explores Hank Pym's past and his current place in the Marvel U. One question though: Why did Tigra suddenly turn hostile after Pym complimented her son? It seemed like a bit of an overreaction to me, but maybe I'm missing something.

Also, as far as guest appearances go, I'd really love to see some of the people from Avengers: The Initiative show up. They could maybe help the Academy kids deal with their problems. Certainly Boulder and Mettle could relate and Sunstreak could talk to Hazmat about how to deal with the lack of human contact. Throw in Cloud 9 (cause she's awesome) and 3-D Man to get something going with the Agents of Atlas (please!) and it could be a real party.

John Bailey

John, a few people felt Tigra was kind of unfair to Hank, but my thought was that she's conflicted over wanting to raise her son by herself, yet also feeling like he might benefit from having his sort-of-Dad in his life, and her uncertainty led to some emotional volatility. As for your suggestion, you must have powers of your own, because several Initiative characters are showing up in issue #13 (another Sean Chen special!), which we're unofficially calling "Super Hero Prom". The Agents of Atlas won't be joining the fun, but how about the Young Allies?

In your letters column I noticed you mentioned Tigra's beating at the hands of the Hood. I do hope you mention which comic that appeared in. I looked back through some of my Avengers: The Initiative, and saw it mentioned again but I couldn't find the event. I'd like to make sure I have that story in my collection.

Marc D. Goldfinger
Belmont, MA

Marc, that took place in *New Avengers #35*, which is collected in *New Avengers Vol. 4*. Thanks for reminding us to let folks know! In a similar vein, Alex asks when Tigra had her baby…Alex, that occurred off-panel during the Dark Reign era of *Avengers: The Initiative*. Norman Osborn wanted Tigra's baby for evil purposes, so she concealed the fact that, like a cat, her pregnancy went full term in just two months, and hid the infant William with the Cat People who gave her powers until Norman was brought down. Thanks for letting us clarify that.

Finally, a reader named JC wrote in to, uh, take exception to the notion of our using the Runaways in *Avengers Academy*. Sorry the idea upset you so much, JC, but maybe it'll be some relief that there are no plans right now for such an appearance…although so many readers want to see it happen, it might yet come to pass. Unfortunately we can't print JC's letter because he or she didn't mark it "OK TO PRINT" (well, that and the salty words)…folks, if you write in please remember to add "OK TO PRINT" to your letter, even if it's a letter of complaint! Other readers might be interested to see your views as well, but that can only happen if you give us permission.

Next: Speedball returns to Stamford! Hazmat returns to San Francisco! Be here!

Christos Gage

NEXT!

Send e-mail to
MHEROES@MARVEL.COM
(please mark as OKAY TO PRINT)

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

WITH WRITER JONATHAN HICKMAN

Marvel: What is the "FF" series all about?

JONATHAN HICKMAN: We made the new old again in Fantastic Four, and now this is about making that sentimental book seem new again... which kind of translates into transforming the FF into a modern Marvel Universe book.

Okay, that sounded ridiculous, how about this: The FF is about injecting the First Family back into the Marvel Universe proper.

Much better.

Marvel: With Fantastic Four #588, you brought an end to Marvel's oldest super hero team. Now you're launching something new, but connected to that past—why is that such a natural evolution of the Fantastic Four concept and characters?

JH: When I took this job, I spent a lot of time reading old issues and really trying to figure out exactly what makes the FF tick: What works, what doesn't work, what used to work, but no longer does... and finally, what has the potential to work — in other words, what new things I can do to enhance the book's legacy and not diminish it.

This — the relaunch and renaming — will make a lot more sense once we get to the other side, but for now, everyone should hopefully just check it, enjoy the ride, and know that my motives are pure.

It's going to be a lot of fun.

Marvel: The big news is new member, Spider-Man. Why was he the perfect fit for the team?

JH: Ehhhhh, lots of reasons, but, unfortunately, that's a read-and-find-out thing. I will say this, he's really a lot of fun to write.

That Dan Slott certainly has a killer gig.

Marvel: You're teaming with Steve Epting — why's he so perfect for this series?

JH: Well, setting aside the fact that he's a pro's pro, insanely talented and a great storyteller, Steve gets the 'scale' that Fantastic Four, and now FF, requires. I'm a lucky guy to be working with him.

Marvel: If someone hasn't read your run on Fantastic Four or isn't familiar with these characters, why is this a perfect time to jump onboard?

JH: First of all, because it's all laid out for you right there in the issue: Where we've been, what's going on now, and more importantly, where we're going.

Secondly, because this is a really good chance to try the characters out in their new skins... to take the ideas of 'Family,' 'Science' and 'Exploration' and ramp them up to their full potential.

Like I said, it's going to be a lot of fun. I hope everyone will check it out.